



SAN BENITO COUNTY

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

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Healthy People in Healthy Communities

Press Release

May is Bicycle Safety Month

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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CONTACT:

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With the weather warming up San Benito County Public Health Services and the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) are highlighting how bicycling is a great way to stay in shape, save money on gas, reduce pollution and when visiting recreational areas, a great way to see the sights. These benefits are nothing new to cyclists and community leaders. Many cities have created bike-friendly routes now complete with bike paths, special bicycle parking areas and special amenities. National Bike Safety Month in May is just one way we celebrate our love to ride.

However, motorists and bicyclists must take extra precautions when they travel together. Riders often share the road with vehicles, which creates a host of hazards, and injuries can happen even on a designated path. In 2016, California passed legislation requiring motorists to proceed past riders with at least a 3 foot of clearance.

According to National Safety Council Injury Facts 2017, 488,123 people were treated in emergency rooms in 2015 after being injured riding a bicycle. The only sport resulting in more injuries overall was basketball, at 493,011. Football was third, at 399,873.

According to Injury Facts, about 1,100 deaths resulted from cyclists colliding with motor vehicles in 2015. With about 80 million bike riders sharing the road with millions of motorized vehicles, the importance of safety precautions in traffic cannot be overstated.

Cyclists who wear a helmet reduce their risk of head injury by an estimated 60%, and brain injury by 58%. That statistic makes sense when you consider the first body part to fly forward in a collision is usually the head, and with nothing but skin and bone to protect the brain, the results can be fatal.

California witnessed 147 bicyclist deaths in 2016, accounting for over four percent of all traffic fatalities, much higher than the national average of over two percent. Nationally, 70 percent of all bicyclists who died in motor vehicle crashes in 2015 died in urban area crashes. Over a 10-year period (2006 to 2015), the average age of cyclists killed in motor vehicle crashes has steadily increased from 41 to 45.

San Benito County has a significant problem with bicycle safety. Office of Traffic Safety SWITRS data collected over a three year period (2013-2015) reveals there were 27 bicycle injuries of which 17 involved youth aged less than 17 in San Benito County.

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"We want people to practice bicycle safety precautions," said Dr. Gail Newel, Health Officer, San Benito County Public Health Service. "A bicycle death is devastating for our entire community. Even when a person survives, there are usually long term serious health consequences."

The following safety tips can save lives and stop this tragedy witnessed far too often in our community:

Drivers:

- "Share the road" with bicyclists
- Be courteous; California law now mandates at least three feet of clearance when passing a bike riders
- Look for cyclists before opening a car door or pulling out from a parking space
- Yield to cyclists at intersections and as directed by signs and signals
- Be especially watchful for riders when making turns, either left or right
- It is unlawful to drive in a bike lane except for 200 feet prior to make a right or left turn

Bicyclists:

- Wear properly fitted bicycle helmets every time they ride. If under 18 years of age, it's the law
- A helmet is the single most effective way to prevent head injury resulting from a bicycle crash
- Riders are considered vehicle operators; they are required to obey the same rules of the road as other vehicle operators, including obeying traffic signs, signals, and lane markings.
- When cycling in the street, cyclists must ride in the same direction as traffic.
- Bicyclists should increase their visibility to drivers by wearing fluorescent or brightly colored clothing during the day, and at dawn and dusk
- To be noticed when riding at night, the law requires a front light and a red reflector to the rear

For additional safety, use a flashing rear light, and use retro-reflective tape or markings on equipment or clothing. For more information on bicycle safety, please call Public Health Services at (831) 637-5367; go to San Benito Public Health Services website <http://hhsa.cosb.us/publichealth/>, or the Office of Traffic Safety website at www.ots.ca.gov.

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Public Health Services provides helmets to low-income families. Call Public Health Services at (831) 637-5367 to get more information on helmets and bicycle safety.

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